

country not like anything we have experienced in our lifetimes. More than 95 million vaccine doses have reached American arms; another 2 million every single day. COVID-related deaths have plummeted, now less than half of their high, particularly for the elderly and the vulnerable. Science reaffirms kids can be safely in the classroom right now. States are starting to lift blanket restrictions, freeing citizens and small businesses to follow smart precautions themselves. For weeks, every indicator has suggested our economy is poised to come roaring back, with more job openings for Americans who need work.

None of these trends began on January 20. President Biden and his Democratic government inherited a tide that had already begun to turn toward decisive victory.

In 2020, Congress passed five historic bipartisan bills to save our health system, protect our economic foundations, and fund Operation Warp Speed to find vaccines. Senate Republicans led the bipartisan CARES Act that got our country through the last year.

The American people already built the parade that has been marching toward victory; Democrats just want to sprint in front of the parade and claim credit.

So when 10 Republican Senators went to the White House to suggest working together, the Democrats said: Uh, no. Both the Democratic leader and the White House Chief of Staff now indicate they think President Obama's problem was that he was too bipartisan.

This time, as one journalist put it, the situation was "Democrats to GOP: Take it or leave it." The "it" that we are talking about here was a bill that only spent about 1 percent on vaccines and about 9 percent on the entire health fight. The rest of the tab went to things like this: a \$350 billion bailout for State and local budgets unrelated to pandemic needs, with strings attached to stop States from cutting taxes on their own citizens down the road—take the money, you don't get to cut taxes; massive Federal school funding spread over several years, without requiring quickly reopening; sweeping new government benefits with no work requirements whatsoever—a time warp to the bad times before bipartisan welfare reform—which Democrats already say they want to make permanent; and agricultural assistance conditioned not on specific financial need but solely on the demographics of the farmer, which some liberal activists are celebrating as "reparations." Only about 20 percent of the spending went to \$1,400 direct checks, to try to keep all of the unrelated socialism out of the spotlight.

This wasn't a bill to finish off the pandemic; it was a multitrillion-dollar Trojan horse full of bad, old liberal ideas. President Biden's own staff keep calling this legislation "the most progressive bill in American history"—

hardly the commonsense bipartisanism that the President promised.

So we pause today at the 1-year mark to remember and to mourn, but we also look with great optimism toward the future. Twenty twenty-one is set to be a historic comeback year, not because of the far-left legislation that was passed after the tide had already turned but because of the resilience of the American people.

(Mr. PADILLA assumed the Chair.)

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, at noon today, the Senate will vote on whether to pluck the Becerra nomination out of committee after it failed to garner enough support to advance.

Every one of President Biden's nominations the Senate has considered so far has received bipartisan support for confirmation. There is a reason Mr. Becerra could not get one single Republican vote to move out of committee. It is because he is such a thoroughly partisan actor with so little subject-matter expertise and such a demonstrated history of hostility toward basic values like the freedom of conscience. There is nothing about Mr. Becerra's record in Congress or in California to suggest he is the best possible person to run the Department of Health and Human Services in the middle of a once-in-a-generation viral pandemic—not even close.

This is too important a job at too important a time for this administration to put raw partisanship ahead of qualifications. So I would strongly urge all Senators to vote against rescuing this nomination from committee. Let's give the President the opportunity to make a better selection.

TRIBUTE TO MARY SUIT JONES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on one final matter, as I have mentioned, it is customary for some top Senate staff positions to see new faces when party control changes hands.

Today, it is my honor to pay tribute to Mary Suit Jones, a huge asset to this institution who has become an institution herself.

Tomorrow, Mary will finish her second separate run as Assistant Secretary of the Senate and conclude a Senate career that has spanned more than a quarter of a century.

I first met Mary Jones in the mid-1990s when we brought her on board to help manage my office. Neither I nor Mary's colleagues back then could have predicted that nearly 30 years later, she would depart as one of the most senior officers in the entire place. But the truth is, if you had told us, nobody would have been even a little surprised either.

I have entrusted Mary with a lot of different responsibilities over the years. She served as our office manager

just a few years out of college. She came with me to the Rules Committee, first as deputy staff director and then the top job. Senator Frist had the good judgment to ask her to be Assistant Secretary in the early 2000s. Then she returned to Rules and resumed serving as our staff director under Senators Bob Bennett, Lamar Alexander, and then Pat Roberts. Finally, she generously brought all of this expertise and institutional knowledge back to the Assistant Secretary role 6 years ago.

In her first job in my office, Mary organized one team of people and our infrastructure. In her current job, she has overseen 26 departments and scores of Senate staff, pushing resources and guidance down and pushing information up. In between, at Rules, she tackled things like helping run Presidential inaugurations.

Through it all, I cannot name one time when Mary Jones did not deliver. She is consistent, competent, and completely reliable. No wonder her name has become a kind of catchphrase around the Senate when anyone is trying to track down some key piece of wisdom or is puzzling over how to get something done: "Well, let's ask Mary Jones." "Have you checked with Mary Jones?" "I think Mary knows all about that."

Everyone from junior staff to senior Senators, Republicans and Democrats, have been able to count on Mary for expertise and execution. On a million different subjects, she knows the answer to the question you are going to ask before you even finish asking it. A rock-solid administrator, a consummate professional—she is just that good.

So I am sorry to see Mary depart the Senate, but she has given generously to this place. She has certainly earned the opportunity to apply her many talents to some new challenges and perhaps knock a few miles off of her famously epic commute while she is at it.

The whole Senate thanks Mary for her excellent service. We wish her, her husband, and their kids all the best in the exciting new chapters that lie ahead.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

MOTION TO DISCHARGE—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to discharge the nomination of Xavier Becerra from the Committee on Finance.

The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senate is now debating the motion to discharge from the Finance Committee the nomination of California Attorney

General Xavier Becerra to head the Department of Health and Human Services.

As chairman of the Finance Committee, I am going to begin with a simple message: Holding up the nomination of Attorney General Becerra has been blocking urgent anti-virus work that needs to get done now. So it is time for the Senate to act quickly, without politics getting in the way, to confirm this nominee.

I also believe moving quickly on this nomination will help to achieve something I heard a lot of Senators talk about over the last few days.

A few days ago, I spent almost 24 hours here at this desk while the Senate was debating a number of different issues. Over the course of that debate and in the weeks before it, many Senators talked about how important it was to get past some of the longstanding disagreements and find unity.

I will say to my colleagues: There could not be a more unifying prospect for America than ending this public health nightmare as quickly as possible, preventing as many COVID-19 deaths as possible, and helping the American people get back to the activities that they enjoy, that they consider part of their normal daily routine.

Having a confirmed Secretary leading the Department of Health and Human Services is a linchpin for accomplishing that task. The Department is right at the effort, at the forefront, to end this contagion. It is leading the distribution of vaccines. It is working to get PPE into the hands of nurses and doctors who still—still—desperately need more of it. It is getting new resources to rural hospitals to keep them afloat and to keep their doors open to patients who literally had nowhere else to go during this crisis.

Health and Human Services is right in the center of the government-wide COVID response. They coordinate work at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, with the Centers for Disease Control, with the National Institutes of Health, with the National Guard, with all 50 States, with the District of Columbia, with private healthcare systems and doctors across the country and more individuals and organizations that are just too numerous to name. Now, that is what the job is all about and why it is so critical right now.

I want to turn to some of what I have heard discussed with respect to Attorney General Becerra. I have heard some say that, well, he doesn't have the right leadership experience. That is a comment being made about the head of America's second largest department of justice. This nominee is in charge of a billion-dollar budget. This nominee is in charge of more than 4,000 employees as the top law enforcement official in what would be the fifth largest economy in the world. This is the work of somebody who really knows how to run a mammoth government agency.

Then there have been suggestions about his healthcare background. This is one that, to me, is just bizarre, given the track record. He spent years and years on the House Ways and Means Committee, which is one of the key committees in the country with respect to jurisdiction over healthcare policy. He wrote and debated major pieces of healthcare legislation, including playing an important role in the development of the Affordable Care Act. As California's attorney general, he defended the Affordable Care Act in court. When the pandemic hit, he stepped up and fought to protect the health and well-being of millions of Californians, particularly nurses and doctors and other workers who found themselves in harm's way.

When one is in the Senate, you understand that Members of the opposing party are going to have disagreements on policy issues. That goes with the turf. Women's healthcare was obviously one of those issues that came up during the nomination hearing.

I will tell you that Attorney General Becerra's response is what we ought to expect of responsible public officials and of nominees. He made it clear to members of the Finance Committee. He said again and again and again that he will follow the law. He will be accessible to all Senators. He is going to work to find common ground on key healthcare issues.

I can tell you, having specialized in healthcare since my days with the Oregon Gray Panthers, that is heavy lifting. By the way, I think it is pretty refreshing after 4 years of just blather about repeal-and-replace and empty rhetoric and promises on pharmaceutical price-gouging and partisan policies that favor insurance companies over the typical American consumers.

In my view, Attorney General Becerra proved in his nomination hearing that he knows healthcare policy inside and out and that he is ready to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. I don't think anybody ought to be particularly surprised because he has a decades-long track record in healthcare leadership and policy experience that is going to help him succeed in the job.

We all understand the country's healthcare system is still under extraordinary pressure and strain. On Saturday, the Senate passed one of the largest public health packages in our country's history, designed to crush this pandemic. So we are starting to see some light. We are starting to see the end of the tunnel. The Biden administration is doing everything it can to acquire more vaccines, to get more shots into arms. I think we all understand it is not a task completed yet.

I will just close by way of saying that when our country faces a healthcare crisis, it needs a Secretary of Health and Human Services confirmed and on the job as soon as possible. It doesn't need more political games and delay

that only sets back our effort to end the pandemic.

So we will be voting, I believe, in less than an hour, and I just want to say that I hope colleagues will support this nomination discharged from the Finance Committee. I have known the attorney general for a number of years. As I say, this is the area that I have specialized in over the years. And I know that Senators have differences of opinion with respect to healthcare. I get that. But those differences of opinion shouldn't stand in the way of a qualified public official who has managed thousands of people in his current job, for example, from having the opportunity to do what has to be done for this country, and that is to get a confirmed nominee for a critical position so that he can attack those challenges that are in front of us right now and help patients and speed up the efforts to end the pandemic.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Republican whip.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I voted for a number of President Biden's nominees—his nominee for Treasury Secretary, for Defense Secretary, for Attorney General, for Director of National Intelligence, for Agriculture Secretary, and others. These candidates were not the ones I would have picked if I were President, but I believe it is important for our country that our President have a team in place.

As long as a President's nominees aren't raising serious concerns, I think a President of either party is entitled to have the people he or she chooses serving in his or her administration, but by the same token, if a President's nominee does raise serious concerns, I think we have a responsibility as Senators to oppose him or her. Today, I rise to oppose the President's nominee to head the Department of Health and Human Services.

A number of President Biden's nominees have been qualified, mainstream candidates. Xavier Becerra is not a mainstream candidate. He is an extremist who has used the offices he has held to advance an aggressively pro-abortion agenda and to target religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Mr. Becerra does not represent the views of the majority of Americans; he represents the views of the radical, pro-abortion wing of the Democratic Party.

The Planned Parenthood wing of the Democratic Party would like Americans to believe that unrestricted abortion on demand up to the moment of birth is a no-brainer, an unqualified good, but the truth is, despite decades of trying to convince Americans of this, Americans simply don't agree.

Just 29 percent of Americans believe that abortion should be legal in all circumstances. The vast majority of Americans believe that abortion should either be illegal or that there should be at least some restrictions, undoubtedly because on some level, every American is aware that when we talk about abortion, we are talking about killing a human being. Mr. Becerra, on the other hand, does not seem to support any restrictions on abortion. If he does, I would sure like to hear about them.

As a Congressman, he earned perfect ratings from Planned Parenthood and NARAL. He assembled an overwhelmingly pro-abortion voting record, even opposing a ban on partial-birth abortion—a procedure so heinous and repulsive, it is difficult to even describe.

As California attorney general, he aggressively crusaded in favor of abortion. He is known for defending California's law forcing crisis pregnancy centers to advertise abortion—a case he lost at the Supreme Court on First Amendment grounds. But his activities were hardly limited to California abortion law. This was not a case of an attorney general simply defending the laws of their own State. No. As California attorney general, Mr. Becerra repeatedly—repeatedly—inserted himself into abortion debates in other States. He joined other attorneys general to file amicus briefs challenging abortion laws in Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and other States, and he frequently led these efforts himself—a fact he proudly highlighted in press releases.

Mr. Becerra's extremist views on abortion would be enough of a red flag, but to that we have to add Mr. Becerra's record on religious liberty and freedom of conscience—most famously his efforts to force religious people, including nuns, to offer health insurance benefits that violate their religious beliefs.

At a Finance Committee hearing, Mr. Becerra tried to downplay his actions in this case. "I never sued [an order of] nuns," he claimed. "I have [sued] the federal government." Well, that is an answer only a lawyer could love. Yes, he didn't sue nuns; he sued the Federal Government to force nuns and other religious people to offer health insurance benefits that violate their consciences. That was the aim of his lawsuit—to force nuns and other religious Americans to act contrary to their consciences.

When an order of nuns, the Little Sisters of the Poor, joined the case in an effort to ensure their right to live according to their faith was protected, Mr. Becerra apparently had no hesitation in continuing his suit.

Mr. Becerra's extremist views on abortion and his record on religious liberty would be troubling in any nominee, but they would matter a lot less if we were talking about a nominee for, say, Secretary of Transportation. But that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about putting Mr.

Becerra in charge of a Cabinet Department entrusted with interpreting and applying laws protecting religious freedom and freedom of conscience.

Nothing I have seen suggests to me that Mr. Becerra can be relied on to provide robust protection for these cherished rights. In fact, I am profoundly concerned that Mr. Becerra would use his office to limit Americans' religious freedom. Under Mr. Becerra's HHS, are nuns going to be forced to offer health insurance benefits that violate their religious faith? Will healthcare professionals be protected from having to perform procedures, like abortions, that violate their consciences?

Given Mr. Becerra's record, I am concerned about the answers to these questions. In fact, there is a reason to be concerned. A prime reason for nominating Mr. Becerra was his radical abortion advocacy and his attacks on religious liberty.

It is difficult to find another reason for nominating Mr. Becerra during a global health emergency. Mr. Becerra is not a doctor. He has not worked in the healthcare field. He is not a virologist or a vaccine expert. He does not have a background in public health. It is not unreasonable to conclude that his appeal to the abortion left, one of the most powerful interest groups in the Democrat Party, was a prime reason for his nomination.

NARAL and Planned Parenthood certainly give credence to that idea with their enthusiastic statements in support of Mr. Becerra, which highlighted his aggressive abortion advocacy. I also have to say that it is pretty interesting to nominate someone to head HHS who, in his last job, proudly sued HHS repeatedly.

I know that President Biden is a man of faith, but he is doing a great disservice to people of faith and to the First Amendment with this nomination. He is also doing a disservice to the American people by nominating a candidate whose views on abortion are so radical and so out of step with the views of most Americans.

Days ago, three of my Democrat colleagues broke ranks with their party to stand up for the many, many Americans who don't want their tax dollars going to pay for abortions. I urge them and all of my colleagues to join me in opposing the nomination of Xavier Becerra.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

REOPENING SCHOOLS

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, we have got an issue in this country related to the pandemic but, more specifically, related to children not going back to school. And one thing that is of incredible concern is it appears that the Biden administration, which campaigned saying that they were going to follow science—alleging that the previous administration was not—seems not to be following science but to prej-

udice their recommendations to fit a political agenda.

With that, let me develop my case. The harms of prolonged closure to school children are remarkable. They are well known. It has been up to a year since the schools have been closed, and in the Presiding Officer's home State of California, there are some school systems that are still not reopened.

Now, think about this: Places where children go, not just to learn but to have social workers make sure they aren't being abused at home, a dietary staff to make sure they have adequate nutrition—but also to learn—have been closed for a year.

Now, we can say: Wait a second, don't worry about that because the children have been given remote learning. There is ample data which shows that particularly the children from lower income families are not logging on even when they are given a broadband computer—given an internet-equipped computer to take home or given WiFi access to use at home. We can imagine it. Mom has to work. There is no one to supervise the child, so the 7-year-old is home by herself while mom is working.

We can also imagine that a family does not have a culture of being online. We can imagine a big family of seven or eight kids where things just kind of get lost in the shuffle, and there is not enough room for someone to be by themselves. Whatever, it is established that there are kids being left behind by not being in the classroom, and those kids, disproportionately, are poor. And that is why the Biden administration's pledge to follow science resonated, and that is why early indications that they are not is not just disappointing, it is a betrayal—and not a betrayal of a campaign pledge, a betrayal of those children who are at home.

Now, by the way, data shows that children can safely go back to school. There was a CDC study from January of 2021 finding little evidence of virus spread in a school setting when the recommended precautions were taken, which kind of calls them—and, by the way, there is a recent study by the following doctors—Henderson, Gandhi, Hoeg, and Johnson from universities such as the University of Chicago, UC Davis, and UC San Francisco—showing how safe it is to go to school, not get infected, and social distancing as minimal as 3 feet distant one from the other—OK, just 3 feet distant.

Now, that is important because if you say you can't bring kids back to school because you don't have enough classroom space for smaller classes, it is one thing if you say there must be 6 feet between each child and another if there only needs to be 3 feet. So these doctors from these prestigious universities found you only need 3 feet.

That begs the question: Why did the Centers for Disease Control, in their February 26 document, say that 6 feet was needed? Now, you may say: 6 feet, 3 feet, why does it make a difference?

Because schools aren't reopening, and their excuse is they need 6 feet between students. They are finding a reason to keep kids at home not learning—a spurious reason.

The doctors who wrote this paper just put an editorial in USA Today in a nice quote here. I say "nice." It kind of summarizes. It is disappointing that they have to say this. It is that—they open up with "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," which is a quote from Franklin Roosevelt. But they go on to say—they speak up for lost wages, for families, and the poverty and eviction that this is resulting in but that the research says there is greater risk to life expectancies with schools closed versus schools open, but they then ask that we overcome fear by following the science. And the science says we can safely reopen our schools now—full-time, nonhybrid—and keep them open. Unfortunately, that is not what the Centers for Disease Control is saying.

Now, by the way, there is a clear agenda here. Part of the agenda is that teachers unions in certain communities have not wanted to reopen. They are more concerned about the union than they are about the children. So whether it is a Democratic mayor of Chicago trying to force the teachers union in Chicago to reopen, whether it is Los Angeles or San Diego, which are still not reopened, with teachers unions objecting to reopening there, this is not based upon science, not based upon risk to the teachers or the children. They would just rather not be at work. Isn't that amazing?

Now, let me tell you who has been open. First, in Louisiana, over 75 percent of our schools have reopened. Hats off to my State. Private and parochial schools have been open. Hats off to them. They are kind of the business model: If you don't get paid, you show up for work. They show up for work. So let's give a hats off.

And that is why there should be school choice. If a parent can't get their child educated in Los Angeles, in San Diego, or in Chicago, then why are we keeping that child from going to a private school? "Oh, they can go," you say. Not if they are poor. If they are poor, they don't have the revenue.

We should take the money that we are giving to those public schools that will not open because the teachers unions oppose it and give it to the parents so their children can go to a school where their children will actually be educated, and the fact that we don't do that is politics over what is best for that child. It is a betrayal of those children.

This administration's policy, 4 months into their 4 years, demonstrates betrayal after betrayal after betrayal. Let's safely reopen schools now. We know we can do so. We knew that a year ago. The science and the data show it. Congress had provided \$68 billion before this latest bill in order to make sure we had everything we need-

ed in order to do that. A lack of funding has not been an excuse to reopen. What is clear is a lack of will, and I will repeat where I started: This administration is betraying the most vulnerable children in our country. Reopen schools now.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I have to tell you, you can always tell how controversial a nominee is by how fast his supporters work to finish the confirmation process, and last night, at 6:12, we found out that the Democrats tried to pull a fast one on Xavier Becerra's nomination. They were trying to fast-track this, and I was able to object to that hotline request, but the fact that they tried it shows that they are worried about this nominee, and they should be. After two unimpressive hearings and seeing the split vote on the Finance Committee, I think my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have come to realize that his lack of experience in the healthcare sector is one of those big things.

You know, we have over 400 healthcare companies in Tennessee and tens of thousands of employees in that sector. They all—each and every one of them—have more healthcare experience than the Biden administration's nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

His greatest hits from his job keep coming back to haunt him, and as much as his allies here in the Senate try to spin his record, they just can't seem to convince people that he is fit to lead. I was curious how wide the divide is between Tennesseans and the Becerra nomination, so I asked my staff to look through our mailbag and see what people were calling and writing about.

This nomination was in the top five issues of concern. People in Tennessee are not happy. As I mentioned, healthcare, our religious organizations—what they are seeing is somebody who has crossed the line too many times. They do not see him as fit to lead.

His lack of experience in the healthcare industry explains why so many people would oppose him. He thinks it would be a good idea to take private health insurance away from 160 million Americans and throw them into a disastrous single-payer system. If that is what you want, then he would be a great Secretary of HHS for you.

If he has his way, he will use his new position to further undermine our immigration laws. He has admitted—his own admission—that given the chance, he would decriminalize illegal entry and extend Medicaid benefits to anyone who manages to make it across the border. It is like winning the lottery. If you get across that border, we are going to give you healthcare benefits, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.

We cannot afford to keep confirming nominees who have zero respect for the

rule of law—zero—and even less respect for the value of human life. Throughout his career, Mr. Becerra has made his appallingly radical positions on abortion very well known. He is proud to support abortion up until the moment of birth. He even opposed the 2003 partial-birth abortion ban. He defended a truly evil California law that forced pro-life crisis pregnancy centers to advertise abortion services offered by State-run clinics.

Recently, a physician friend of mine made a comment about Mr. Becerra's nomination that has really stuck with me. She said:

I'm horrified—

Bear in mind, this is a physician.

I'm horrified by his position on abortion because he would abort a baby that I would resuscitate. He would abort a baby that a family is willing to adopt.

Now, think about that. This is a guy, in his congressional career and in his job as the attorney general for California, he is a radical on abortion—a radical. You have physicians who stand there to resuscitate these babies that have difficulty during birth. He would allow those babies to be aborted when a physician would choose life, would choose to help that baby live.

According to Mr. Becerra, religious exemptions should be a thing of the past. He relentlessly harassed religious employers like Hobby Lobby and non-profit organizations like the Little Sisters of the Poor as part of his crusade to uphold ObamaCare's contraception mandate. I think it is clear why the Finance Committee split their vote on this nomination. It has nothing to do with politics.

Xavier Becerra's obsession with dismantling American society and rebuilding it in his own image can't be boiled down to a simple policy position. Instead, it signals his desire to force Americans to live their lives according to his twisted world view.

He may have the approval of leftists, but the American people and thousands of Tennesseans have already written him off as radically unqualified, and, frankly, so have I.

I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing this motion to discharge and opposing the nomination. He is radically anti-life, anti-religion, anti-border security, anti-free speech. He is unqualified to lead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

NOMINATION OF DEBRA ANNE HAALAND

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, Montana has a rich outdoor heritage. It is something we are known for not just across the country but even around the world and something, as Montanans, we are very proud of.

In fact, for generations, Montana families have enjoyed hunting, fishing, recreating on public lands. I myself am an avid outdoorsman. In fact, some of my fondest memories growing up in Montana are spending time with my

family, my dad, my mom, my grandpa hunting, fishing, backpacking in our State. And, thankfully, I have had a chance to pass it on to our own four children—something we still enjoy doing today, my wife and I, as we are now empty nesters.

Recreation on public lands is part of our Montana way of life. It is how we raise our families in Montana. And just as we cherish our access to our public lands, we also value the conservation of our lands, as well as the stewardship of our vast natural resources.

Energy development flourishes in Montana. It provides over 16,000 hard-working men and women with good-paying jobs to support their families, while funding conservation and protecting our landscapes and wildlife. Montana is still a State where hard-working moms and dads who work hard during the week are thankful for many jobs provided by the natural resources in our State. They work hard during the week, but on the weekends, they go down to Walmart, Bob Ward's Sports' warehouse, and Ace Sporting Goods store and buy an elk tag over the counter, a fishing license, and get into our public lands within 30 minutes of buying that license. That is uniquely part of our Montana experience. These jobs that we have in the natural resource industry, these energy jobs, are part of who we are as Montanans because we are a State full of diverse interests, competing priorities, sometimes opposing philosophies. But time and again, stakeholders have come together to find balance and achieve our most lasting conservation wins.

That is a word that is missing in Washington, DC, as we are seeing a new administration come to power; it is the word "balance." You see, as Montanans, we are proud stewards of our beautiful landscapes, our rivers, our natural resources, and our wildlife. We take pride in following the science and listening to our local experts on the ground to do what is best for our environment and our public lands, as well as our rural communities.

And this legacy of balance is intertwined within the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. The Secretary of the Interior oversees much of America's lands, our water, wildlife, energy resources, and in many ways oversees our Montana way of life. Over the past few years, we have seen Secretaries of the Interior with a range of views—some I agree with, some I haven't. But one thing was consistent, they were consensus builders. They were able to listen to the needs of diverse stakeholders, bring folks together, come up with a solution that worked for almost everybody. I would use the word "balance" again.

Unfortunately, Representative HAALAND has a very well-documented and hostile record toward made-in-America energy, toward natural resource development, toward wildlife management, and sportsmen. Throughout her tenure as a Congresswoman,

Representative HAALAND championed the Green New Deal. She advocated for the most extreme positions, including banning all fossil fuels.

She cosponsored legislation to provide Federal protections for grizzly bears forever without considering the science that is very clear that supports delisting that species and returning it back to the States, just like we did with wolves back in 2011.

She has been enthusiastic in her calls to stop not just the Keystone Pipeline but all pipelines, calling for a ban for all pipelines. She even protested the Dakota Access Pipeline herself.

She has stated that trapping shouldn't be allowed on public lands. And as noted by several sportsmen groups, Representative HAALAND would not even commit to maintaining current access on our public lands during the hearing. I can tell you, these are not mainstream views held by most Montanans.

I am not opposed to Representative HAALAND's confirmation because she is a Democrat or because she was nominated by President Biden. In fact, I have supported many of the President's nominees. This is about her record, her very far-left, divisive positions that will fail to represent the West, to be in the mainstream of common sense and balance. And I fear she will harm the Montana way of life as we know it.

This is about protecting our Montana way of life, the ability to have a good-paying job during the week and enjoying our public lands on the weekends because if you kill the energy jobs, you kill all the pipelines, you kill our natural resources, Montana is left to be simply a playground for the rich and famous. We have to stand up for our hard-working Montanans and protect their way of life.

This is about maintaining a common-sense balance. We can develop our natural resources and protect our public lands at the same time. We can do both, and we must do both.

So I urge my colleagues, especially those from Western States that hold many of these same values, to really think about what Representative HAALAND would bring to the Department of the Interior as leader of that organization. I urge my colleagues to consider the impact this will have and to vote against Representative HAALAND's nomination for Secretary of the Interior.

I yield back my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I know we are having a vote in a moment. I ask unanimous consent that the vote not start until I finish my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I don't plan to speak long, but listening to my colleagues, I just wanted to make a few points.

Our former colleague, Representative Becerra, spent much time in the Congress—I think 12 terms—much of that in a position focusing on healthcare policy as a member of the Ways and Means Committee. I say that because I know so many of our colleagues, particularly House Members, have gone on to run Agencies, run Departments, be Secretaries of Defense, and, basically, they just had some congressional experience in that policy area.

So I am not sure why we are discarding that important policy background, consideration, balancing of those issues, weighing in on parts of our constituencies, as Mr. Becerra did.

And Mr. Becerra was the first Hispanic to be a member of the Ways and Means Committee. So I am pretty sure he brought forth a context to many of the healthcare policies. I know now that I bring a lot of focus on Native American issues to the Finance Committee because I represent so many Native Americans.

I think Mr. Becerra represents somebody who has a lot of healthcare experience and then, as attorney general, took on one of the biggest fights we need to have right now, which is the affordability of prescription drug pricing and the shortages that I believe are artificially created on things like insulin and other drugs that are spiking out of control the healthcare prices for Americans.

If you had to say, besides getting access to affordable healthcare insurance, what the second most important goal would be—or, actually, if you asked across the spectrum of millions of Americans—they would say it is the high cost of prescription drugs. And we have somebody who has taken on this battle and, basically, really understands what we need to do as a nation in lowering prescription drug prices.

So I just hope that people who are at home are listening. This is a unique individual who I think stands up truth to power many times in his career, and I think that we would be great if we have his vote and nomination out here on the Senate floor so the American people can hear more about the important policies.

If you want to vote against him because you don't want the Affordable Care Act, well, that is your prerogative. But if you want somebody who has just as much experience as any other Member of Congress who has gone on to run an Agency, I guarantee you he is as qualified, if not more qualified.

So I hope our colleagues will vote yes on this motion to bring Xavier Becerra before the United States Senate.

I thank the President.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON MOTION TO DISCHARGE

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). Under the previous order, the question is on agreeing to the motion to discharge the nomination of Xavier Becerra from the Committee on Finance.

Mr. CARDIN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR).

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 117 Ex.]

YEAS—51

Baldwin	Heinrich	Peters
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Reed
Blumenthal	Hirono	Rosen
Booker	Kaine	Sanders
Brown	Kelly	Schatz
Cantwell	King	Schumer
Cardin	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Carper	Leahy	Sinema
Casey	Lujan	Smith
Collins	Manchin	Stabenow
Coons	Markey	Tester
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Feinstein	Murray	Warren
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Hassan	Padilla	Wyden

NAYS—48

Barrasso	Grassley	Portman
Blackburn	Hagerty	Risch
Blunt	Hawley	Romney
Boozman	Hoeven	Rounds
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Capito	Inhofe	Sasse
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Lankford	Shelby
Cramer	Lee	Sullivan
Crapo	Lummis	Thune
Cruz	Marshall	Tillis
Daines	McConnell	Toomey
Ernst	Moran	Tuberville
Fischer	Murkowski	Wicker
Graham	Paul	Young

NOT VOTING—1

Burr

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to the provisions in S. Res. 27 and the motion being agreed to, the nomination will be placed on the Executive Calendar.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Debra Anne Haaland, of New Mexico, to be Secretary of the Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 26.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Isabella Casillas Guzman, of California, to be Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 26, Isabella Casillas Guzman, of California, to be Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

Charles E. Schumer, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard Blumenthal, Christopher A. Coons, Patty Murray, Chris Van Hollen, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jeff Merkley, Brian Schatz, Cory A. Booker, Amy Klobuchar, Sherrod Brown, Angus S. King, Jr., Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Tim Kaine, Tammy Baldwin, Ron Wyden.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 29.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 29, Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

Charles E. Schumer, Chris Van Hollen, Michael F. Bennet, Jack Reed, Tammy Duckworth, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jeff Merkley, Christopher A. Coons, Richard Blumenthal, Patrick J. Leahy, Amy Klobuchar, Tina Smith, Brian Schatz, Robert Menendez, Richard J. Durbin, Martin Heinrich, Maria Cantwell.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions filed today be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF DEBRA ANNE HAALAND

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, on Monday, the Senate will vote on the nomination of Congresswoman DEB HAALAND to serve as Secretary of the Interior. I have had a chance to vote on a number of nominations over the years. I want to tell the Senate that, on Monday, the Senate can make history.

The Congresswoman—and she faced some strong questioning in the committee—understands that protecting public lands and boosting rural communities and jobs are two sides of the same coin. Too often, in the debates in Washington, DC, they really involve something resembling false choices. You can either be for jobs or you can be for protecting your treasures. The Congresswoman understands that those two are not mutually exclusive and that, in the West, particularly when you look at our exciting recreation economic engine, this is a chance to really generate more jobs, protect treasures, and enhance our quality of life.

Now, I recognize that there have been powerful interest groups that try, for example, to protect the interests of big oil companies at taxpayer expense, at the expense of clean air and clean water, and, as I say, at the expense of everybody who wants to get outside. I know that part of the debate is proping up a dirty environmental policy and declining industry that, mostly, adds to the current climate crisis.

In the long run, what we need to do is find fresh ways to bring Americans together around areas, particularly for rural communities, that are going to bridge the urban-rural divide, reduce